

VZCZCXRO4166

RR RUEHIK RUEHPOD RUEHPW RUEHYG

DE RUEHBUL #4142 3520724

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

R 180724Z DEC 07

FM AMEMBASSY KABUL

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1940

INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC

RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4317

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS KABUL 004142

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A

STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG

NSC FOR HARRIMAN

OSD FOR KIMMITT

CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76 POLAD

SENSITIVE, SIPDIS

E.O. 12958 N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV ETRD AF

SUBJECT: Afghans and Tajiks agree to Double Opening Hours of Bridge as Afghan Customs revenue also doubles

¶1. (U) Summary: At a USG hosted meeting on December 17, Afghan and Tajik officials discussed current operations of, and ways forward for, the US-built and financed Afghan-Tajik bridge. Participants agreed to extend opening hours, consider pedestrian traffic and identify a common frequency for radio communications. The USG representatives ensured that both governments were informed about the timeline for the upcoming handover of the soon-to-be-completed border crossing points (Jan/Feb 2008) and associated personnel and training requirements. Since the bridge's opening, Afghan monthly customs revenue has increased from \$80,000 to \$150,000. Facilitated by US leadership, the two parties are productively engaging one another to maximize their utilization from the bridge. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Afghan and Tajik local and regional border police and customs officials, along with Afghan representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and the intelligence service met on Dec 17, 2007 at the US Army Corps of Engineers office on the Tajik side of the Afghan-Tajik Bridge. Embassy Kabul's PRT Officer in Kunduz, coordinating with Embassy Dushanbe, organized and chaired the meeting.

Opening Hours Doubled - Pedestrian Traffic Considered

¶3. (SBU) The Afghans and Tajiks agreed to extend the current operating hours of the bridge from four to eight hours a day for vehicle traffic beginning immediately after the upcoming Eid holiday. Although the Afghans would prefer otherwise, the border will remain closed on Sundays and will not be open to pedestrian traffic. The Tajiks agreed, however, to raise these two items for discussion within their respective ministries. A representative from the Tajik border guard commented that the original bilateral border agreement needed to be amended to reference the new bridge.

Security - Communications, Barbed Wire and Video Cameras

¶4. (SBU) While neither Afghans nor Tajiks reported any hostile activity directed at the bridge, both parties were interested in improving the perimeter security and their incident response ability. The Afghan border police will prepare an internal Ministry of Interior request for barbed wire for perimeter security. Participants noted their reliance on commercial cellular

communications and agreed to work through their governments to identify a common frequency for radio communications.

Who's Dorm? Yours or Mine?

¶5. (U) With the exception of inspection halls equipped with truck scanners, the Afghan and Tajik border crossing points will be completed by February 2008. The US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) will conduct facility walk-through with future occupants to ensure that adequate personnel have been identified for staffing and training purposes. One outstanding Afghan question is whether the dormitory facility is intended for the Border or Customs Police. The Afghan representatives will sit separately to consider a temporary egress from the border crossing point to the Commercial Customs Facility until the EU-funded connector road is completed in Aug/Sept 2008.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) With six weeks of bridge-operating experience under their belts, Afghans and Tajiks are eager to expand operations, albeit cautiously and with deference to their ministries. Afghan monthly customs revenue has increased from \$80,000 to \$150,00. Facilitated by US leadership, the two parties are productively engaging one another to maximize their utilization from the bridge. With the departure of a permanent USG ACE presence at the bridge this month, an international customs or border advisor for either the Afghan or Tajik side may be needed to ensure that the forward momentum continues. All told, the bridge has been a success and traffic has increased. As the head of Afghan customs privately remarked, it is only a matter of time before the sheep start making their own journey across the bridge. End Comment.